THE OBLATE ASSAULT ON CANADA'S NORTH-WEST. By ROBERT CHOQUETTE. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995. 258 p., b&w illus., maps, bib., index. Softbound. Cdn$27.00.

Robert Choquette, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa, offers a valuable, major gap-filling presentation of the history of Oblate missionary work in Canada's North and West, particularly during the nineteenth century, when these vast regions of the nation were rapidly opening to European influence and settlement.

The book's dominant theme is the Oblate missionary "assault" on the territory and its people. The author extensively describes and critically assesses this story. For their part, the Oblates have always portrayed it as both a territorial and human "conquest of liberation" by religious warriors of their Roman Catholic Church on behalf of Canada's aboriginal population. What actually happened, says the author, was the subjugation of the Native people to white, Euro-Canadian society. The entire narrative is couched in military terms of conquest to portray the aggressive stance of the Oblates in their effort to occupy every key position in the land, to convert the Indians, and to regiment themselves in their quest to defeat an ever-threatening enemy.

Several key subthemes are extensively explored. Two major cultures—English Protestant and French Catholic—played a dominant and normally conflicting and competitive role in the Oblate operation. For the Oblates, "the enemy" included the forces of evil in general and Protestant missionary adversaries in particular. The order, whose numbers were drawn largely from French-speaking parts of Europe and from Quebec, realized that it was operating on "English territory" and had to preserve good rapport with the Hudson's Bay Company as well as with non-Catholic missionaries. But Choquette contends that for almost a century and a half (between 1845 and 1991, the year of the Oblate apology to the Native people), the main intent of their mission among the aboriginal peoples of the North and West was to conquer them religiously and to assimilate them into non-Native society.

An important development in the writing of Canada's history is taking place with the appearance of this book. In truth, Choquette does not intend the work as an expression of missionary propaganda (in spite of research support from the Oblates). Yet neither is the book to be considered a typical academic blast against the missionaries. Choquette summarizes the purpose of his research and writing as follows:

> In spite of a growing list of studies, and their increasingly improved quality, a basic understanding of the history of Christianity in Canada's North and West has still to find its way into the writings of some Canadian historians. … [The] religious illiteracy of many Canadians, scholars included, … means that even those who sense the importance of religion do not know how to study it. (p. 24)

Worth special mention are the biographies of many significant Oblates who make up the narrative. Missing, unfortunately, are heroic women's stories. (Granted, the focus of this book is on male religious. But the reality is that Grey Nuns and other orders of sisters worked side by side with the men at almost every step of the way.) A suggestion for future research is, therefore, that missionary women and Native people be provided the same access to the documents and opportunities for writing that are reflected here.

One of the important ironies of the historical record in general is that while competition and conflict between English and French, Protestant and Catholic have been well described; the clear message is conveyed by Choquette that there was chronic and considerable dissension even within the Catholic ranks. The cases of priests distrusting one another, of priests and bishops in conflict, and of major peccadilloes and perversions on the part of a small percentage of the clergy all make for interesting and enlightened engagement with the real history. That is an important benefit of serious study of the missionary correspondence in its own right. Not only does it bring out aspects of the narrative that would not normally have been reported by the Church; it also suggests that the people who conducted this religious campaign were truly human beings—not plaster saints to be easily venerated by the faithful or denigrated by secular critics. That these religious might be expected to live a better-than-average and exemplary life is readily appreciated. But that their stories would appear without blemish is also unlikely. The author serves us well by delivering his message with candour.

The book is well documented, with an extensive and helpful bibliography as well as a good index. Choquette's archival research took him to numerous secular as well as religious collections in both East and West. This is highly commendable. He has no doubt done considerable research, and one would suspect, it is not for this book alone.

This reviewer, while seeing the work as historiographically responsible, is not overly taken by the author's pronounced military metaphors. He regards *The Oblate Assault* as the beginning of a new genre of historical writing about the West and North that takes missionary history seriously, yet sees it in terms of larger, influential and prevailing contemporary developments. That the Church should give the author of this work such access to its records and liberty with his conclusions is to be commended. That the author should take on the current historical establishment by challenging its tendency to political correctness is also worthy of note. Truly Choquette is "walking a tightrope" between two possible extremes and, on the whole, he succeeds uniquely with his intentions to be both an honest historian and an advocate of the Church's significant historical contribution. For this reason alone, the book is a good investment.

This leads to a final comment on historical revisionism. History is always being revised, as a result of constantly changing scholarly perception. Choquette describes the Oblate assault in military terms, and thus plays into two common and negative stereotypes: religious and military. He admits to, but comments little on, the reality that fully 85% of Canada's Native people claim currently to be Christian. This must indeed say something of the deep, steadfast love and

commitment of many Oblate religious. It is also clear that, in addition to their recent apology, the Oblates intend to remain with the Native people—now more than ever and as long as they can—as friends, advocates, and students.

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JOURNALS OF THE PRIEST IOANN VENIAMINOV IN ALASKA, 1823–36. Translated by JEROME KISSLINGER, with introduction and commentary by S.A. MOUSALIMAS. The Rasmuson Library Historical Translation Series, Vol. VII. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1993. xxxix + 220 p., notes, index. Softbound. US$17.50.

Reading diary accounts of others does not guarantee inspiration. At first assessment, Veniaminov's journals, written in the careful, spare form presented here, do not lend to much excitement. His short, almost daily entries of tireless missionary activity covering close to eleven years on Unalaska and other Aleutian islands (plus added recordings of trips to Sitka and California) first struck this reader as rather mundane.

However, when these journals are studied within the larger context of the life and service of this "model northern missionary" of the Russian Orthodox tradition, his accounts become noteworthy and revealing. With the publication of this firsthand collection, we now have a work through which to read Aleut history as it was taking place. It records how a missionary and his Native associate co-produced the first literature published in the local Aleut languages. Petrivelli summarizes: "This history pertains particularly to the Aleut religion, and it is their religion that has sustained our people" (Petrivelli, Foreword, p. vii).

It seems appropriate to provide a certain backdrop to this documentation. Following the European discovery of Alaska in 1741, Siberian adventurers frequently visited the Aleutians. Quite a number remained permanently and married Alaskan women. They brought their Russian Orthodoxy with them, and their children were raised with a modicum of Christian piety (e.g., baptism and basic prayers). When the first Orthodox missionaries arrived from Valamo, Finland in 1794, they found, to their surprise, that most Aleuts were already "pre-evangelized" Christians. What they lacked were essential church teachings, liturgical disciplines, and pastoral ministrations. In many ways, Veniaminov's missionary style provided just the kind of benign "law and order" that was required by a people that, for several generations, had been integrating its traditional native spiritualities with Eastern Christianity.

Soon after his arrival in Unalaska in 1824, Veniaminov (who eventually became the Metropolitan of Moscow) developed a writing system and started translating scriptures, creeds and liturgies into the local Aleut dialects. Being of a practical as well as a spiritual bent, he founded several schools, constructed two churches, decorated them with icons, and built organs to accompany worship. He was instrumental in evangelizing indigenous peoples on both sides of the Bering Sea, thus providing a Christian spiritual solidarity that linked the continents. He was both a teacher and a disciple of those he served.

Perhaps most significantly, Veniaminov established a contextualized or enculturated form of evangelization that was not to become commonly accepted by the majority of Christian missionaries for nearly a century and a half.

When Veniaminov later became bishop, he would ensure that principles he had developed as a missionary priest were practiced in every station founded in the Aleutians. Workers would strive to master the local tongues and use them in their pastoral service. Wherever possible, traditional Native qualities and spiritual customs would be affirmed. Compare this to Christian missionary activity exercised almost anywhere else, where Native languages, practices and spiritual traditions were demonized and denigrated, and it is not surprising that the Aleutian church developed a loyal, stable following that has survived to the present.

From those foundations of demonstrated priestly holiness and education—characteristics highly venerated among Orthodox Christians everywhere—emerged two generations of Native Alaskan lay missionaries. These aboriginal leaders were responsible not only for the survival, but also for the growth of the church in Alaska after the colony was sold to the United States in 1867. At that time most Siberian clergy returned to Russia, and the diocese shifted its attention and focus from Asia to America.

These eleven journals (plus addenda) reflect the busy schedule of a devoted priest whose overriding concern was to communicate and to understand the folkways of his flock. He notes these endeavours routinely and simply. Also included are observations of flora and fauna. Veniaminov expressed a concern for the protection of endangered species long before it became common or fashionable to do so. Behind the notation of celebrating daily services, preaching, teaching, baptizing, hearing confessions, and visiting the sick is reflected the devotion of a man with a healthy spirituality. "Everything in life is linked to everything else" is clearly the philosophy recorded here, and this is no doubt one of the qualities that endeared him to the people.

The introduction by S.A. Mousalimas provides a frame of reference to help the reader understand the journals; an explanation of technical terms and concepts; an outline of how Veniaminov conceived and developed his parish; assistance to make the journals a useful resource in the study of Aleut history; and an overture to a fuller appreciation of Veniaminov's ministry and character.

With valuable Foreword, Afterword and introductory support, these rather mundane records assume a special vitality. Reread, with appropriate clarification, at least some casual notations take on a serendipitous quality. In many cases,